

MAN'S FEAR OF HIMSELF WHEN HE REACHES MIDDLE AGE

Danger of That Period in Early Forties When So Many Men Go to Pieces

NOT the hot fires of youth nor the smouldering embers of advanced age occasionally bursting into flame, but that sudden, insane, almost unaccountable explosion of middle life constitutes the danger which, especially among others than the toiling multitude, threatens destruction to home, dissolution of marriage ties, ruin of a promising career and disgrace.

"The Demon of Middle Age," thus has been described that critical period in the early forties when so many men of responsible business and social position go to pieces.

"The Demon of Middle Age" accurately describes those years running all the way from the late twenties through the thirties when many a woman suddenly leaps blindly over the barriers of restraint which society has erected through ages of experience for its own protection.

And the significant tragedy of it all lies in the fact that this amazing revolution, physical, mental, spiritual, frequently is seen in those who have previously led circumspect lives, who have been honorable in business dealings with their fellows, who have achieved prominence in works of charity, benevolence, philanthropy, even in religious endeavor.

From childhood they have grown up, cared for by wise parents; educated by trained teachers; nurtured, guarded from contaminating influences, inspired to live righteously and honestly. Through youthful years, through young manhood and young womanhood they have pursued their way, until, almost without warning, even to themselves, they find they are in the grip of "The Demon of Middle Age."

Every one is familiar with this curious and tragic manifestation of the play of contending forces in human nature. Take the recent Caltaux murder trial in Paris: take the dual personality in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Go back still further, go back thousands of years, and consider that sublime epic in the Old Testament, the Book of Job, wherein an inspired writer has portrayed the struggle of forces making for good with those making for evil.

History as well as mythology is full of instances in which the Demon of Middle Age has changed not merely individual careers but often settled the fate of nations. Where would France be to-day if Napoleon had escaped the Demon? Suppose that Josephine had been true to him—what momentous results might not have followed for mankind?

As it was, she, earlier than the young Gen. Bonaparte, yielded to the lure of the Demon. When, shortly after their marriage, he went at the head of the armies of France to invade Italy, he loved the beautiful Creole with an intensity of which few men are capable. This is more than indicated by the letters he sent back to her from every place where the troops halted—letters reproduced a few weeks ago in THE SUN and SIX. He begged her to join him, but there in the gayeties and luxury of Paris the Demon already was at work.

Josephine's head was filled with fancies that she thought were realities; she was fated, honored, sought by men of personal attraction, and before long she was smitten with madness. It was not until after that time, not until he was persuaded of her infidelity, of her disloyalty to him and all he stood for, that Bonaparte rushed forward to throw himself into the meshes of the Demon. If Josephine had clung steadfast to her husband and if he had stood like a rock for the inviolability of their life together subsequent history might have been changed throughout the world.

What is it that causes men and women, even of the highest position, the keenest intellect, to fall victims of the Demon of Middle Age? Is this well recognized phenomenon a result of physiological conditions or material environment, or are the causes largely psychological in character? If we can arrive at some approach to a definite cause, possibly preventive measures may be formulated intelligently and imparted to those who have not as yet arrived at the critical period referred to. Certainly it is worth while to consider the matter with this possibility in view.

In answer to the question just propounded, it may be said that there are many contributing causes to the downfall of men between the ages of 35 and 45; of women between the ages of 25 and 40. As girls mature earlier than boys, so women reach the dangerous age sooner than men.

If asked the question as to the greatest contributing cause for this particular form of human downfall the average physiologist will tell you it lies in the response to nature's great law of life. Possibilities that are correct, yet there may be underlying causes far beyond this one. It is not necessary to take the case of Harry Thaw for example, but how about the man he slew that night on the roof garden, a man who had achieved international fame in his branch of art, who had wealth, position, family connections, friends, and associates among the most desirable to be found anywhere in the world? What caused him to be seized with madness by the Demon of Middle Age?

Take another case, much more recent, of a beautiful young woman resident in New York, also a member of a family of wealth, culture, social position. Early in life she married a man in her own set and for several years they seemed to be perfectly happy. Two children were born to them, each partaking of their father's brilliant mind, their mother's extraordinary beauty.

Then, little by little, the husband began to fear that his health was failing. He consulted a physician after physician, subjected himself to diets, to courses of baths and physical exercises, travelled to one health resort after another, refused to go out at night to any kind of entertainment, or social gathering lest his health should be further impaired. In reality there was nothing wrong with this man's physical condition which could not have been remedied if he had taken the advice of eminent medical men, deliberately tossed aside his fears and gone out for three or four months with competent guides. But he could not bring himself to undergo such rigorous treatment; he guarded himself from every draught, got into the habit of weighing his food for each meal and in the course of time became a hypochondriac.

Often when sitting with his beautiful wife on the veranda of their summer place he would pull out a case containing a clinical thermometer and try to take his own temperature. He could not bear noise, so his children were virtually banished. He was afraid of the effect of music on his nerves, so his wife gave up singing—the one recreation left to her—and she had a voice of gorgeous richness.

During these years the wife passed from 23 to 28. She seldom saw friends of her own age. Invitations were declined so regularly, time after time, that finally they ceased coming. At 28 she was at the height of her mental and physical development. She, as well as her husband, had all the money they could desire; and yet she was chained to a rock, with the great world whirling all around her.

One day she did not come home for dinner. A few days later the husband received a wireless saying she was on her way to Europe. Then came reports that she was accompanied by a man both of them had known but a short time, a man ten years older than her.

With more than a little relief the father saw his family go away. They were to stay down on the New Jersey coast for the entire summer. Now he could close the house and take a room

breakfast and toil at his office until long after his clerks had gone home. Then, when completely fagged out, he would reluctantly start homeward himself. After a silent dinner, eaten as a matter of duty, he would bury himself in an easy chair for an hour, smoking a cigar and reading a newspaper. By 9 o'clock he retired, from sheer exhaustion.

Sometimes his young wife went out to a dance or a game of cards, or to the theatre with friends who understood her situation and pitied her. Often by far she stayed at home, trying to pass the time by reading a novel or by sewing—for the children were abed and the evenings were long and lonely. At first she used to try to entice her husband in ordinary conversation while he was glancing over his evening paper; but soon gave it up, because his replies were so short. This man had in mind just one thing—to make a fortune by the time he was 45 and to sacrifice everything else to this end.

In such effort the thirties slipped away, and that next summer his oldest child, a boy, suffered an illness and the doctor advised that he be taken to the seashore to recuperate.

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young wife with madness? For her the Demon of Middle Age was a veritable demon for life. And she, too, was but 30 when she left her children in that summer hotel. Complete, indeed, must be the madness which will cause a mother to desert her young!

It is not the case of "When We Were Twenty-one." The peccadilloes of youth are bad enough and often bring in their train a line of misery which may endure for more than one generation; but even these may be of minor importance as compared with the ruin wrought through the Demon of Middle Age. Do you think that this tragedy of life is confined to the rich and cultured, to those various strata which in America make up the composite of what is termed "society"? Never was greater mistake. Rich and poor, ignorant and learned, well bred and boor, suffer alike from the madness. The "angry goddess" knows no such merely human distinction as caste.

Make a tour of the cheapest lodging houses of the great cities; go any day or evening in good weather to Union Square, Madison Square, to any of the smaller parks in more congested sections, and glance at the men lounging on the benches. Some of them are workmen out for a breath of air, self-respecting, conscious of their right to stand erect with head up, earning a living for their families. But these are in the small minority.

Most of those shambling, poorly clad

nearby resorts in summer, wonderful shops to visit, pageants to see, free lectures and concerts, libraries and museums. And then, perhaps, a child is born, a year or so later another one. Mrs. Jones cannot think of having her babies spend sweltering summer weather in the great crowded city, so she goes away for a month or six weeks; if she goes to her father's home in the country she stays there two months, or even three.

And Jones, who has been coming home after a hard day's work to a small apartment pervaded by the noise and confusion inseparable from young children, sees them go with not a little relief. It will do them all good to get away from town, he reflects, and now—for the first time in a year or more—he can live in peace and quiet; he can relax the nervous tension he has been under. Also he can figure in quiet upon the chance in scale of living which he plainly sees is imperative; for Jones has not been able to save anything for a long time and expenses are mounting higher and higher. That is one of the principal reasons why he is irritable; why his face has grown thin, his eyes anxious.

Jones has a good time that summer; there is little question as to that. He knows other men whose families are away, still others who invite him to run out to their homes in the suburbs or at nearby coast resorts to dine and

Many Contributing Causes Which Render Men Helpless to Resist the Lure of the Demon

the children home to her father's for that summer she vowed and declared that never would she come back to her husband until he had apologized, until he had changed his attitude toward her, until he made up his mind to love, honor and protect her as he had promised to do when they were married. And in the excitement of the situation, his head bursting with dread and anger, his heart rankling with what he deemed the injustice of it all, Jones let her take their children home to her father and himself plunged over the abyss.

A fanciful illustration, you say? Not at all; a very common one. Moreover, a result to be expected under the circumstances.

Of course Jones was selfish; most men are. Of course he should have taken into consideration the fact that in bearing their children his wife had been subjected to physical and mental strain such as no man can understand; that in watching over them in illness and health this strain had been extended until she was really incapable of controlling her nerves, of maintaining

attitudes the familiar black sheep of the family. And, again, it may be asked, who is there bold enough to say why this particular son or daughter, reared in the same home and under the same conditions with brothers and sisters who do not go wrong—why should this particular one plunge into the chasm?

It cannot be always, even usually, a matter of home influence and scholastic training. Not long after the war with Spain there was sent to Manila an army captain who had achieved high rank at West Point and had acquired himself more than creditably afterward—let us give him the fictitious name of Smith. He was sent to the Philippines for a term of years, and there took his wife and two children. At first Capt. Smith was a gentleman all that an officer and a gentleman should be. He passed into the early forties; drink and the gambling fever got him—through these the angry goddess smote.

He fell lower and lower. He fell as far into that abyss where the Demon was waiting for his wife and children had to leave him and return to New York. Then he was found to have gambled funds entrusted to him; he was dishonorably discharged from the army, suffered punishment, and finally was shipped back to the Pacific coast.

After months of privation this wreck of manhood, with his brilliant army career gone forever, managed to get his way East as far as New York. He was half starved, had no friends, no money, and he committed burglary. Before he could get away from the house he entered he was arrested, then tried and sentenced to a term in the penitentiary. While there he was placed in the cell with Porter Charlton, the wife murderer, until Charlton seriously objected.

"This fellow is no mean," said Charlton, "that he'd steal from his own cell mate."

This time the angry goddess had done her work thoroughly indeed!

At the end of his term of imprisonment the former army captain was discharged, and obtained a ferry ticket, which enabled him to cross the Hudson, and at 8 o'clock that summer evening he found himself walking eastward through Fourteenth street. On he went, block after block, and was moving Sixth avenue when some one tapped him on the arm. The recent prison bird shook him off.

"Let me alone!" Smith muttered, plodding along with head down, hands in the pockets of his coat, eyes on the sidewalk.

The man who had tried to stop him walked by his side.

"Look here, my friend," he said, "you seem to be sick and in trouble."

"What's that to you?" Smith demanded without looking up.

"Everything—it's my business to help folks who are in trouble. Where are you going?"

"Across town—to make a hole in the river."

It's a pretty long walk, from here. Why don't you step inside with me and get a little rest, first. We've got a room just for that purpose, with comfortable chairs and music to listen to."

Then Smith looked up for the first time, and saw that the other man wore the uniform of the Salvation Army. He was one of the scouts patrolling near headquarters, watching for men and women with desperation in their eyes, with the telltale prison pallor on their faces.

Smith was weak and half sick. He allowed himself to be led into a large hall where a meeting was in progress. He was given a cup of coffee and some food, and then he rested in a chair and listened while other men got up here and there in the audience, telling how they had had such experiences as he had been through—although not in the army—and how they had been pulled up on their feet. Well dressed these men were, too; strong, courageous, unafraid to face the world and tell their story; men who were earning a good livelihood and who did not hesitate to mention the jobs they held down. And every man of them said that when he got so low that no human power on earth could help he threw himself in very desperation, on a power not human.

Smith listened as if fascinated, over him swept remembrance of his career of his wife and children of his present degradation. Then he, too, threw himself unreservedly on that mysterious Power which the speakers had made so real in their stories. There was no emotional excitement about it; but in the twinkling of an eye Smith was rescued, his life was saved then and there as surely as if some life guard had thrown him a rope when he was struggling in the water of the East River.

That night the Salvation Army people put him to bed; then for days and nights they nursed him, for he was really ill. When he became strong enough they sent him to one of their industrial homes, where he was given light work to do, and every morning he was watched, especially when sent out of the building on errands. Then came a day, a few months later, when a Salvation Army officer went to the president of one of the great railroads and told him Smith's story from beginning to end.

"I want a job for this man," he said, and the railway president gave it. It was a small job, at \$15 a week, but Smith took it and made good. He made so good, in fact, that he was advanced in pay and in responsibilities. To-day Smith is in charge of one of the principal freight districts of New York for that same railway. It is a living in a home of his own with his wife and children, and his salary is several thousand dollars a year. More than that, if you go to the Salvation Army headquarters on a certain evening every month you will find Mr. Smith seated in the audience; and on the platform you will hear Smith tell the story, as it is recited here, of how he was almost strangled by the Demon of Middle Age, and how he escaped.

There are exceptions to every rule, but more and more science is saying openly what a few years ago it admitted only grudgingly—that for the average man or woman who is down and out morally, who is in the grip of the Demon of Middle Age, the one sure way of escape is for that man and that woman to face their condition, realize to what depths they have fallen, and realize further that something more than human power is needed if they are to be saved utter disgrace and oblivion.

"When Will They Finish New York?" Constant Query of City Visitors



Scenes such as that shown in the above photograph of Twenty-third street looking west from Broadway are familiar to the New Yorker, but to the European visitor are quite puzzling. They cannot understand why such a street condition should exist in the heart of the great city.

self, full of life and fun, who sang and danced and played, who was a yachtman, who had carried on many a flirtation with girls here and elsewhere, but who had never married.

They had met accidentally. He knew something of her position, of her husband's unconscious cruelty. He was fascinated by her beauty and grace and charm. And she, on the other hand, was intoxicated by this new acquaintance. Each of them some "angry goddess smote with madness." They eloped; a few months afterward the deserted and hypochondriacal husband committed suicide. To-day the little children are living with grandparents, wondering sometimes where their beautiful mother is, and when she is coming back to them.

Who is there bold enough to lay the blame for this case of ruin wrought by the Demon of Middle Age? It is easy to say that the husband, with his imaginary ailments, was responsible; and in a way he was, of course. Yet, even if his ailments were imaginary in the eyes of others, to him they were very real. Every effort short of actual carrying him off into the woods was made to give him healthful occupation of mind and body—the one thing needed for recovery of his mental and physical poise. The main difficulty, it would seem, is that he had too much money.

If he had had to work for his daily bread there would have been no time for him to worry about himself, to consider this symptom and that, to fancy that all sorts of disabilities were growing upon him. As for his wife, constant association for years with such a man might be expected to drive her nearly distracted. It is easy to see why she fell a victim to the Demon, even at the cost of deserting her children.

Take the case of still another young woman, the only daughter of a family occupying a position of prominence and corresponding influence in a large city up the State. She too was a girl of unusual beauty and wit. She too married early; but she married a man who had to work for their support. In fact he was so engrossed in his business that he seldom saw his young wife after the first year or two.

He would leave home soon after

in a hotel within five minutes walk of his office. He could give himself up, wholly and completely, to business for nearly three months!

The little family went away—the mother, still young and full of life, three children and a nursemaid. For several weeks letters came to the father telling of fun and frolic there by the sea, of tennis and dances, of new acquaintances; and urgent requests came that he join them even if only for the week end, now and then. But he smiled, and sent back word that such a thing could not be thought of; he had so much business he could not attend to it. He must make hay while the sun shone. Brief letters, they were, which he sent back to the wife who begged him to come down there to the seashore—just a few lines hastily written.

Then one week toward the end of the season he failed to receive a letter from her. He waited a few days and fearing that the boy was ill again sent a telegram. In response came to him from the nursemaid a message saying her mistress had left the hotel five days previously and had not come back.

The next train that started toward New York from that up-State city carried the busy business man as one of its passengers. He whirled through New York as fast as wheels could carry him, rushed down to the summer resort and found that in addition to his wife another guest at the hotel where she was staying had disappeared the day she vanished—a bachelor of 43 from the middle West, with whom she had often gone in bathing, with whom she had walked on the sands, with whom she had taken moonlight drives and with whom she had danced at the casino so often as to cause comment. They went, as did the other eloping couple, to Europe. They have not been heard of in years.

The husband has a divorce, but he has not acquired a fortune. The blow was so sudden and so terrific that it took the fighting spirit out of him. Bold plans for enlarging his business were abandoned and gradually the business passed into the hands of others.

Was this man's ambition to make money, at the cost of everything else, the "angry goddess" who smote him

men, slouching in the wooden benches, frowzy, unwashed, shod by their anxious expression, or even more plainly by their stolid attitude, who and what they are. Day after day they hang around public square or cheap lodging house, until compelled to move on. And almost all of them are men in the forties.

Go to the Charities Department here or elsewhere in the country, and ask the average age of the men being cared for as public charges; ask the wardens of jails and prisons the average age of convicts when they first are placed in confinement. Remember the recent statement in THE SUN of Everett Macy, who is making an exhaustive study of the causes of poverty itself, up in Westchester county, and you will learn that the typical applicant for relief is "an alcoholic of 40." But Mr. Macy carefully refrains from saying whether alcoholism causes the human wreck of alcoholism itself is caused by poverty, misery, despair, that drive the man so far down toward degradation that he seeks oblivion in alcohol. The one outstanding fact seems to be that the man who is seized with this madness becomes its victim at the age of 40 or thereabout—be he rich or poor, educated or unlettered.

Aside from the cause which physiologists assign as the one most important there can be no question that there are many contributing causes of human wreck at middle age. What is it which leads a man to place himself in the path of temptation? Let us take two or three definite cases, as concrete examples, and see if we may reason therefrom.

Take the case of Jones, born and brought up in a small Connecticut town, who comes to New York, obtains employment, works like a nigger for a few years, and finally earns a salary which he thinks is sufficient for the support of a wife. He marries, very likely a girl from his native place or from some small town in New Jersey or elsewhere, who has been brought up in her father's home and who looks forward to light housekeeping in a tiny apartment as she would look forward to an extended picnic.

For a while everything goes smoothly and happily; there are excursions to

spend the night. It is not necessary for Jones to make a fool of himself with any of the thousands of attractive young women whom he might easily meet; but the sisters and cousins of his unmarried friends, the wives of his married friends in New Jersey or Long Island are so daintily dressed, so bright and cheerful, so full of fun and jollity, that he cannot help comparing them with his own Mabel, who is spending the summer with their children up there in Connecticut; and Jones has to confess to himself that Mabel long ago gave up trying to make herself agreeable and entertaining to him.

Of course he knows that she has been under a great strain since the children came. She has watched over them and stayed up nights when they were ill. But just the same, she might have tried to dress becomingly, to be interested in the things he was interested in.

When Mabel came back from her father's home in September the apartment seemed smaller than ever, more cluttered up with the children's things than before, more untidy, and cramped, and impossible. Even when they moved into a larger apartment, further uptown, that October Mabel seemed to have less and less thought for him.

Expenses were mounting, too. Often when she had gone to bed early, all tired out, Jones would sit with a pad of paper on his knee, trying to calculate what was to be the end of it all. And then, with a groan, he would go to bed himself and try to sleep. The angry goddess had commenced her part.

She continued it that year, and the next, while irritability grew into bickering, downright quarrelling, harsh words. Jones went out alone in the evenings more than ever now, although Mabel sometimes went with him. He was working as few men worked in his own particular place of employment, and his salary had been increased several times. Then, suddenly, both he and Mabel were smitten with madness.

Words of recrimination passed between them which could never be recalled. The situation grew more tense as hot weather approached with its debilitating effect, its heavier weight on jangling nerves, and when Mabel took

the poise and charm Jones found so delightful in another woman when he visited a friend over night who had a home near the great city. Nor was Jones altogether to blame.

In this particular instance the blame should largely rest upon the artificial conditions of life under which he existed, as thousands upon thousands of other men exist in the great cities of America. Had he been content to have a modest cottage in the country, to undergo the discomfort of commuting daily to business, of leading a rational life, he and Mabel might have escaped the Demon—might have escaped, bear in mind; for this Demon is not absent from towns and villages of commuters—not by any means.

At the other extreme of society one may find instances without number. Take a certain fashionable summer resort at a particular crossing of two important avenues where four great estates happen to converge. A few years ago the four wives and the four husbands living on the estates were each having a second—in some cases a third—experience of married life. Each of the four married before. On two of the estates lived couples who had merely swapped husbands and wives by means of the divorce court. And in every one of these eight instances the man or the woman had led a blameless life, so far as is known, until seized by that Demon of Middle Age.

In pursuing this subject the inquirer will find now and then a man, but more often a woman, who by temperamental condition, frequently neurotic from childhood, is almost inevitably smitten with the madness. The original cause may lie far back, possibly a tendency inherited through one or more generations, which finally produces a girl sparkling with wit, clever as can be, fascinating in every imaginable way, yet unstable at the foundation.

Many a man, steady in business and society, has married such a young woman, only to suffer a sudden awakening when it is too late. It is by no means seldom that one son or one daughter out of a large family may shoot off at a tangent in middle life, while all the rest remain in position of high respectability. Such a one con-